



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

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May 5, 2005

Ref: 8EPR-SR

Ms. Carol Ann Peltier
Lincoln County Parks and Recreation
Libby, MT 59923

Dear Carol Ann:

I understand that the County has an equestrian event and other activities planned for J. Neils Park in September 2005. You've stated that some people from out of town who plan to attend the event have concerns about their health and the impacts of asbestos contamination in Libby. With this letter, I hope to allay some of their fears and put the issues in context.

While conditions were likely much different in the past, EPA's current concerns about asbestos in Libby are not related to the ambient air around town, but rather the air immediately in the vicinity of a disturbance of asbestos contaminated soils or materials. If there is no disturbance of contaminated materials, there is not likely to be any exposure or health concerns. For nearly five years, we've collected air samples around town and generally don't find any asbestos. This is because most of the major sources around town, like the former vermiculite processing plants, have long been shut down and cleaned up. The public areas and schools with evidence of contamination have been cleaned up, and things continue to improve with each small cleanup we accomplish. Libby today is a far safer place to live and visit than it was ten years ago or especially thirty years ago - when much of the exposure occurred that caused the disease we see today. Our EPA cleanup team lives and works in Libby and we will continue to for years.

Our current efforts in Libby focus on smaller, property-specific areas of contamination. There are many properties, mostly residential, where vermiculite materials were used as a soil additive, for fill, or as insulation in homes. If you disturb these materials, they can release asbestos into the air where it becomes a problem and, over time, can contaminate dust in the home. These properties and materials are a concern for those living there and pose an even higher risk for contractors and tradesmen who may work in them frequently. EPA is working diligently to identify these properties, assess the risk they present, and clean them up accordingly. These areas pose little concern for visitors to Libby. Libby hotels have all been inspected and found to be clean. In fact, we temporarily relocate residents whose homes we are cleaning up to local hotels. EPA encourages Libby and Lincoln County to promote tourism.

People relocating to Libby should know that each property is inspected and sampled by EPA to determine whether vermiculite or Libby asbestos contamination is present. If Libby asbestos contamination is found, the cleanup is done by EPA at no cost to the homeowner. EPA also maintains an Information Center in Libby as a resource to the community. Informational fact sheets and technical documents on risk, the investigation, cleanup and health issues are available to help people make informed decisions.

J. Neils Park itself was recently inspected and sampled by EPA. More than 70 soil samples were analyzed. No asbestos was detected in 67 of these samples. This doesn't mean that those samples are completely free of *any* asbestos, only that analysts could not see it using state-of-the-art analysis. In three samples where we did detect asbestos, we detected only "trace" levels. "Trace" indicates that asbestos was detected at a level that was too low for us to quantify. I've included a map with this letter showing sample locations and results.

Additionally, we observed visible vermiculite (which can be a good indicator of asbestos) in a few locations – including two of the ballfields, where one of the "trace" sample results was located, and near the bathrooms. Together, these sample and inspection results indicate to me that vermiculite was used at the park as fill or a soil additive in the past, and because of that, there is a low level of asbestos present in some of the soil at the park. That is a common situation in Libby. EPA will be doing a cleanup of the ballfields the week of May 2, 2005 to remove the asbestos and will conduct post-cleanup monitoring to ensure the area is safe.

There is also no concern for livestock at the park or anywhere else. In general, most animals don't have life spans long enough to be affected by asbestos (it generally takes 20-40 years to show symptoms). To my knowledge, this is a human concern entirely. Similarly, we have no evidence that suggests grazing and ingesting asbestos is a serious health concern – the primary exposure route is breathing air that contains asbestos.

I hope this helps. I would be glad to discuss these issues with potential visitors if they are interested. I can be reached at (303) 312-6748.

Sincerely,



Jim Christiansen
Remedial Project Manager



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